

# **Illumination: What is the Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation?**

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# Illumination: What is the Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation?

## Introduction

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation today? Most evangelicals assume that the role of the interpreter in Bible study is to discover the author's intended meaning as expressed in the biblical text.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the interpreter follows an interpretative procedure in order to attempt to discover the textual meaning. However, a question arises at this point: Is the utilization of a procedure sufficient to enable the interpreter to arrive at the author's intended meaning? Can the interpreter discover this meaning on his own? Or does he need some help from the Holy Spirit (hereafter HS) to get the meaning? Does the HS have a role in the interpreter's quest to discover the original meaning?

If the HS does have a role in the pursuit of meaning, what is that role? Does He guide the interpreter to a true meaning of a biblical text? Does He enable the believer to have special insight so that he or she can comprehend the meaning of a text? Should the interpreter pray that the HS help him/her to discover the meaning of a text? Or does the HS help the believer to accept and/or apply the meaning of the text only?

The question relating to the role of the HS in interpretation is quite important. The answer to this question will affect the way in which interpreters approach a text in at least three ways. First, the answers may affect his/her preparation. Does he/she expect help from the HS as he/she prepares? Second, the answers may affect his/her praying. Does the interpreter pray before, during, and/or after he/she prepares, and for what does he/she pray? Third, the answers will affect his/her preaching/presentation. Does he/she present his/her interpretation with dogmatic certainty or with conditional certainty?

There are different answers to these questions among Evangelicals. Many Evangelical interpreters think that the role of the HS in interpretation is to help the interpreter understand the

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<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this paper is not to define, discuss, or defend the author's intended meaning as the goal of interpretation. For a helpful treatment of this goal of interpretation see, Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: an Introduction* (Zondervan: 1990), 23-30 and Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (Baker: 2007), 22-23.

meaning of a text. These interpreters think that illumination of the HS “is needed if man is to understand the meaning of the Bible and be certain of its truth.”<sup>2</sup> They say that the HS “brings to the Christian greater cognitive understanding of the biblical text” through illumination when he/she interprets Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

There are interpreters who think that “there is an internal working of the HS, illumining the understanding of the hearer or reader of the Bible, bringing about comprehension of its meaning, and creating a certainty of its truth and divine origin.”<sup>4</sup> These interpreters regard “illumination” as the special guidance which the HS gives to Christians to help them understand the meaning of the Bible. Here illumination refers to the work of the HS in “elucidating some passage of the Bible to a person while studying.”<sup>5</sup>

These interpreters hold to the view of illumination which “teaches that the HS does a supernatural work of grace in the believer’s mind and life, making possible the understanding of the Scripture He has inspired.”<sup>6</sup> This work of grace happens when the Scripture is read or heard.<sup>7</sup> These interpreters propose that illumination is “the work of the HS as he opens one’s spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> It refers to the ministry of the HS helping the believer to understand the truth of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> These argue illumination is the “ministry of the HS in enlightening the believer, enabling the believer to understand the Word of God.”<sup>10</sup> According to this view the Spirit “is available to help believers ascertain the correct meaning of the Bible’s statements, commands, and questions.”<sup>11</sup> To these interpreters illumination is “indispensible for discerning the true

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<sup>2</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Volume 1 (Baker: 1983), 247.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Kregel: 2010), 144.

<sup>4</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:247.

<sup>5</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible* (Hendrickson: 2006) 175.

<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* (Baker: 1993), 33, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Revised Edition (Crossway: 2001), 96.

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Word: 1992), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor: 1986), 116.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody: 1989), 637.

<sup>11</sup> Roy B. Zuck, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” *BibSac* 141.562 (April-June 1984), 120.

meaning of the Spirit-breathed Scripture.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, interpreters should pray that the HS would give them illumination and thereby help them to understand rightly when they interpret Scripture.<sup>13</sup> This view of illumination could be called the “meaning-view” since its adherents think that the HS helps the Christian interpreter understand the meaning of the Bible.

However, there are interpreters who understand illumination differently. They hold that illumination means that the HS assists the believer in applying the textual meaning. They think that the HS provides a “dynamic comprehension of the *significance of Scripture* and its *application to life*.”<sup>14</sup> They hold that “one of the unique roles of the HS is to convict, convince, and arouse sluggish hearts by applying the truths perceived in the text of Scripture to the lives of individuals.”<sup>15</sup> They think that the HS “opens the reader’s minds and hearts so that the words can produce all their intended effects.”<sup>16</sup> Those who understand illumination in this way accordingly think that “to pray that the HS would help us recognize the truth of the text (its significance) or to show which of the implications<sup>17</sup> apply particularly to us and our situation (divine guidance) is both appropriate and devout.”<sup>18</sup>

There are still other interpreters who think that the role of the HS in interpretation is to enable him/her to accept or welcome the meaning expressed in the text. These think that the “basic thrust of the HS’s illuminating or enlightening work relates primarily to our *welcoming of the truths* rather than our *understanding* of them.”<sup>19</sup> They propose that the role of the HS is “to change the heart of the interpreter, so that he loves the message” that the textual meaning conveys.<sup>20</sup> These interpreters “look

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<sup>12</sup> Fred H. Klooster, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relationship of the Spirit’s Illumination to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible*, Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, editors (Zondervan: 1984), 452.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan: 1994), 645.

<sup>14</sup> William W. Craig, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Introduction*, Revised and Updated (Nelson: 2004), 139.

<sup>15</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, Revised and Expanded (Zondervan: 2007), 218.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (Zondervan: 1998), 428.

<sup>17</sup> An implication is a meaning in a text of which the author was unaware but which nevertheless falls within the author’s intended meaning; see Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Baker: 1994), 26-27, 35-43.

<sup>18</sup> Stein, *Guide*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Walt Russell, *Playing With Fire* (Navpress: 2000), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Eerdmans: 1978), 190.

to God to enable them to have and maintain that humble and contrite spirit that will welcome what the Bible teaches.”<sup>21</sup>

What then is the role of the HS in interpretation? Does He help the interpreter to ascertain the meaning of a text, to apply the meaning of a text, or to accept the meaning of a text? Which role is correct? Are all roles correct? Is a combination of roles correct? The answer to this question and related questions is important to the interpreter. As stated earlier, the answer will affect him/her in at least three ways.

This paper will look at various passages which some think teach that the HS is somehow involved in interpretation. These are passages which proponents of the traditional view of illumination think support their position. The purpose of this study is to discover their meaning and whether they teach anything about the role of the HS in interpretation. This paper does not intend to present a detailed study of the passages, but rather an initial consideration of them.

## JOHN 14:26

### Contention

Jesus here promises his disciples that the Father will send them the *paravklhtoV* who will teach them all things and cause them to remember all things which Jesus said to them. Some writers think that this promised HS “teaching-work” relates to interpretation and is available to all believers at all times. Millard J. Erickson suggests that this verse shows that the “HS’s ministry involves elucidating the truth.” He adds that his promise was “not restricted to merely the first hearers, for they involve promises claimed . . . by the whole church throughout all time. It is logical to conclude that teaching regarding the Spirit’s ministry are for us as well.”<sup>22</sup> Stephen J. Nichols writes that this passage relates “specifically to the ministry of the HS as our teacher.”<sup>23</sup> Craig S. Keener thinks that “John intends this

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<sup>21</sup> Fuller, “Role,” 197-98.

<sup>22</sup> Erickson, *Theology*, 250-51.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, “The Holy Spirit, Our Teacher,” in *Basic Theology Applied*, Wesley and Elaine Willis, John and Janet Master, eds. (Victor: 1995), 221.

promise for his readers, not just for Jesus' first hearers."<sup>24</sup> Wayne Grudem refers to this verse as showing that an aspect of the HS's revealing work "is teaching certain things to God's people and illumining them so they can understand things."<sup>25</sup>

## Content

Jesus is about to leave the eleven disciples and return to his Father. Therefore, he prepares them for their future ministry apart from him. In the course of Jesus' "preparation-discourse" (13:31-16:33) he promises the disciples that the Father will send them the paravklhtoV. This paravklhtoV will teach the disciples all things and cause them to remember all that Jesus taught them (14:26). When we look at this promise, we need to notice 1) to whom Jesus gave the promise, 2) why Jesus made the promise, 3) what the promise involved, and 4) when the promise becomes effective.

First, Jesus makes the promise to the eleven disciples. The plural pronoun<sup>26</sup> indicates that Jesus gives this promise to the group. The disciples are the historical recipients of the promise. Judas has left, and Jesus is encouraging the remaining eleven: this promise is part of his instructions to them. He has already promised the disciples that the Father would send the paravklhtoV who would be with them (14:16-17). He then repeats the promise and adds that the paravklhtoV will have a teaching and reminding ministry to them. This promise refers to an enabling work which the HS will accomplish in them.

Second, Jesus gives the promise to the eleven because he is leaving them. He makes the promise because he is going to the Father and will no longer be with them. He is preparing his disciples for his departure and their time on earth apart from his physical presence. Because Jesus is about to leave the disciples, he encourages the disciples so that they might not be troubled. This promise is part of his encouragement. Jesus' promise concerns the disciples' future ministry when he is no longer with

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<sup>24</sup> Craig S. Keener, *3 Crucial Questions about the HS* (Baker: 1996), 144.

<sup>25</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 644. Grudem does say that Jesus promised this teaching function especially to his disciples, 644-45.

<sup>26</sup> Greek uJma:V.

them. Since Jesus will not be with them in person, the Father will send the paravklhtoV to help<sup>27</sup> the disciples.

Third, Jesus promises the disciples that the paravklhtoV will teach and remind<sup>28</sup> them of everything that Jesus had taught them. “Teach” and “remind” are closely related in this promise.<sup>29</sup> There is little or no distinction between them.<sup>30</sup> They are activities of equal status.<sup>31</sup> Teaching and reminding<sup>32</sup> are most likely viewed as a single entity.<sup>33</sup> Thus the teaching and reminding should probably be seen as two ways of speaking the same thing.<sup>34</sup> When the HS enables the disciples to recall what Jesus said to them in the past, he then teaches them what they remember. The paravklhtoV’ teaching work is limited, since he teaches the disciples only what Jesus has already said to them. This specific subject matter which the paravklhtoV teaches the eleven historicizes and limits the scope of the promise. The paravklhtoV does not bring qualitatively new revelation to the eleven, but he evidently completes, fills out earlier revelation which Jesus gave to the disciples.<sup>35</sup> Jesus does not explain the nature of or reason for the paravklhtoV teaching, but we can assume that this “teaching ministry” was significant.

Fourth, the promise will become effective sometime in the disciples’ future. The Father will not send the paravklhtoV to the disciples until after Jesus goes to the Father and no longer remains with

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<sup>27</sup> This verb assumes “helper” as the translation of paravklhtoV in this verse. Because paravklhtoV is a difficult word to translate, many writers simply translate it as “Paraclete.” For translating it “helper,” see Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Eerdmans: 1981), 478-9. Andreas J. Kostenberger, *JOHN*, ECNT (Baker: 2004), 434 translates it “another helping presence.”

<sup>28</sup> Greek  $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\omicron\mu\eta\eta\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota$  which means “cause to be in the mind in a time subsequent to earlier experience or awareness,” Danker, *Lexicon*, 365-66.

<sup>29</sup> The use of *kai*; (“and”) between the two nouns constrains the connected verb to be closely associated with the preceding verb; Runge, *Grammar*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Kevin Titrud, “The Overlooked KAI in the Greek New Testament,” in *Notes on Translation* 5.1, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2d edit. (JSOT: 1994), 211.

<sup>32</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre suggests that “in John, to remember something means both to recall it and to understand it,” *John*, IVPNTC (IVP: 1999), 364. Gary M. Burge, writes that “the concept of ‘remembering’ occurs multiple times in this Gospel and is linked to the “misunderstanding” of the disciples”; *John*, NIVAC (Zondervan: 2000), 399.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Whitacre, *John*, 364. He suggests translating the clause as “that one will teach you everything, that is, he will remind you of everything which I said to you.”

<sup>35</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans: 1991), 505.



them. Sometime after Jesus departs, the “teaching-work” which he promised the disciples will take place.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus promised this “teaching-work” to specific recipients—the eleven disciples; for a specific reason—he was leaving them to return to the Father; for a specific purpose—to teach the disciples what Jesus had said to them, and for a specific time—after Jesus returns to the Father—when the eleven will be without him. The specificity of this “teaching-work”—the recipients, the reason, the content, and the effective time—seems to limit this promise work to the disciples. Also the subject matter which the *paravklhtoV* will teach the disciples appears to place the “teaching-work” in a historical context which limits it to the disciples. Jesus said things to the disciples when he was with them which they needed to recall and understand. Consequently, Jesus promised them that he would send the *paravklhtoV* to them who would both cause them to remember what Jesus had said to them and teach them what Jesus had said to them.

## **Contribution**

The specificity of the nature and object of the promised ministry limits the promise to the disciples only. First, the nature of the ministry involves both teaching and causing to remember. These are connected activities which are so closely related that they might be considered one activity. Second, the object of the ministry is specific material which Jesus had already communicated to the disciples. Therefore, the HS’s ministry involves teaching about and causing to remember a specific body of historical material. The promised ministry is limited to the disciples in their historical situation. The historical specificity of the disciples’ situation and Jesus’ promise make this a non-repeatable situation.

Consequently, this promise cannot apply to subsequent believers and their interpretation of the Bible. Jesus said nothing to subsequent believers of which the HS needs both to remind them and teach them. (If the HS teaches subsequent believers, as some propose, we might infer that he must also cause them to remember something.)

Jesus did not say anything personally to subsequent believers which subsequent believers need help to remember and to interpret. “This passage says nothing about the HS enabling ‘us’ to remember or understand everything the earthly Jesus said.”<sup>36</sup>

## JOHN 16:13

### Contention

Jesus now tells the disciples that when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide them in all truth. The proponents of the traditional view understand this HS “guiding-work” which Jesus promised to the eleven disciples to relate “to the ministry of the of the HS in helping the believer to understand the truth of the Bible.”<sup>37</sup> Charles C. Ryrie thinks that the presence of the HS “in the believer guarantees the availability of this ministry to all believers.”<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Thomas thinks that this verse contains “the promise of the Spirit to the believer to illuminate Scripture.”<sup>39</sup> Robert L. Plummer writes that this verse implies that “all Christians are assured of the supernatural presence of the HS, who will teach them and protect them from all error.”<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, however, Roy B. Zuck recognizes that this promise was addressed specifically to the disciples, but thinks that “all believers may be similarly guided into the truth about Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Gary M. Burge argues that the promise of this verse is extended to every Christian.<sup>42</sup> At least we see that the final two interpreters distinguish between original and subsequent audiences, an observation which is interesting from the perspective of this paper.

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<sup>36</sup> Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand* (Victor: 1994), 76.

<sup>37</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 116.

<sup>38</sup> For example Ryrie writes that John 16:12-15 teaches several facts about illumination and that the HS illumines the meaning of the closed canon (through study and mediation); see *Basic Theology*, 116 and Millard J. Erickson uses John 16:13-14 to say that the HS leads believers into truth; *Christian Theology*, 3:874.

<sup>39</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Kregel: 2002), 123. Thomas understands illumination to function “in connection with man’s ability to understand what is written.”

<sup>40</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Victor: 1991), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Burge, *John*, 446. See also Philip Wesley Comfort, *I Am the Way* (Baker: 1994), 136-37.

## Content

In this part of his “preparation-discourse” (16:12-13) Jesus promises the disciples that when the Spirit of truth (the *paravklhtoV*)<sup>43</sup> comes, he will guide them in<sup>44</sup> all truth. By making this promise to his disciples, Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for his departure. He still has many things to say to them, but they are not able<sup>45</sup> to bear them at this time. The verb “to bear”<sup>46</sup> means literally to carry an object from one place to another.<sup>47</sup> However, this literal sense does not fit here. Alternatively, Jesus uses it in the figurative sense of carrying something or *enduring*<sup>48</sup> something. Although Jesus has more to say to them, they are not capable of “carrying” it. The new revelation would be burdensome for them. Jesus does not give the reason for their inability to bear more teaching, nor does he explain “bearing.” He simply says that this inability prohibits Jesus from saying more to the disciples at this time.

Since the disciples are presently unable to bear what Jesus has yet to say to them, the HS will guide<sup>49</sup> them in all truth when he comes. This guidance is necessary because of the disciples’ present inability to bear additional teaching from Jesus. However, when the HS’s “guiding-enablement” takes effect, the disciples will evidently be able to bear the “truth” into which the HS will guide them. “Guide” means literally to help someone reach a destination<sup>50</sup> and refers in everyday usage to someone guiding someone to another place.<sup>51</sup> Here it seems to mean guiding the disciples into truth as a specific

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<sup>43</sup> Jesus does not use the name *paravklhtoV* in this promise’ but it is obvious that he is referring to him.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the minor textual variant in this verse, *ejn* or *eijV*, see Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (German Bible Study: 2006), 2003; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 268, Carson, *John*, 539. This paper assumes that *ejn*, “in,” is the preferred reading. For the view that *eijV* is the preferred reading see J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. II, ICC (T. & T. Clark: 1928), 509-10 and Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Eerdmans: 1972), 504. However, *ejn* and *eijV* are often confused in Hellenistic Greek, indicating little sense of difference in meaning.

<sup>45</sup> Greek *duvnaqe* which has the sense “be capable for doing or achieving” something; Danker, *Lexicon*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Greek *bastavzein*.

<sup>47</sup> *BDAG*, 171; *EDNT*, 1:208.

<sup>48</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John* (SPCK: 1958), 407; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Hendrickson: 1997), 106. For this meaning see Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:10; Revelation 2:2.

<sup>49</sup> Greek *oJdhghvsei*.

<sup>50</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 246. See Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; Revelation 7:17.

<sup>51</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, ECNT (Baker: 2007), 342.

destination. Jesus does not define “truth.” Rather, he simply says that this truth concerns future things which the disciples cannot presently bear. Consequently, this promised guidance will take place in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus’ earlier promise concerned the HS reminding and teaching the disciples of that which Jesus had already taught them. This promise concerns the HS guiding the disciples concerning that which Jesus has yet to teach them. Since the disciples are unable to bear more revelation which Jesus wants yet to give to them, Jesus promises them that the HS will give that revelation to them. Thus Jesus ensures that his revelation for the disciples will be completed. As the HS completes that revelation, he will guide the disciples in all truth.

This promise also contains explicit and implicit specificity. Explicitly, it was given to a specific group, at a specific point of time, and concerning specific material. Implicitly, the promise was given for a specific purpose. First, it was given to the disciples at a specific time. Second, it was given when they were unable to bear any additional revelation which they needed to know. Therefore, because the disciples needed to know this revelation, Jesus promised to give it to them through the HS. Third, this promise also concerned specific material which the HS would receive from Jesus and give to the disciples. Fourth, the promise was given to complete Jesus’ revelation to the disciples. This promised activity was necessary for the disciples to receive and understand complete revelation from Jesus. The HS would give the disciples specific guidance relating to a specific body of truth. This specificity historicizes and therefore limits the promise to the disciples. Their situation requires this promised work of the HS. Jesus made the promise because of the disciples’ situation. It was thus a “situation-promise.” Jesus’ promise was the solution for their situation. The disciples’ situation was unique to them and required a specific promise.

## **Contribution**

The specificity of the time, material, and purpose makes this a non-repeatable situation which restricts Jesus’ promise to the disciples and precludes subsequent Christians. First, subsequent believing

interpreters do not receive revelation from Jesus (as the disciples did) so there is not a time when they are unable to receive more revelation from him. Second, there is, therefore, no need for Jesus to promise them future revelation. Third, subsequent interpreters have complete revelation in the Scriptures. They do not need the HS to give them and guide them in additional information. Consequently, this promise cannot apply to Christians as they interpret the Bible. These Christians are not in the unique situation as the disciples were and therefore, do not need the same promise.

## LUKE 24:45

### Contention

Some writers think that this verse supports the role of the HS in interpretation as enabling the interpreter to comprehend the meaning of the Bible. Referring to this verse, John MacArthur, Jr. writes: “The disciples grasped the meaning of the Old Testament only after Jesus ‘opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.’ For believers today it is the Spirit of Christ that provides comparable understanding.”<sup>52</sup> Just as Jesus opened the mind of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, the HS opens the mind of interpreters today that they might know the meaning of the Bible. Robert L. Plummer, who writes that illumination means that “the Spirit brings to the Christian greater cognitive understanding of the biblical text,” writes that this verse supports this doctrine of illumination.<sup>53</sup>

### Content

While Jesus was eating with his disciples after his resurrection, he reminds them that “these happenings, specifically the resurrection, represent the outworking of the things I taught you.”<sup>54</sup> “His life has been the outworking of Scripture.”<sup>55</sup> He tells them that everything that was written about him in the Scriptures must be fulfilled. He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

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<sup>52</sup> MacArthur, *Preaching*, 102-3.

<sup>53</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 144-48.

<sup>54</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke*, Revised Edition, TNTC (IVP: 1988), 373.

<sup>55</sup> Darrell L. Bock. *Luke*, IVPNTC (IVP: 1994), 387.

When looking at the content of this verse, we need to answer four questions: (1) What did Jesus do? (2) To whom did Jesus do what he did? (3) When did Jesus do what he did? (4) Why did Jesus do what He did? First, Jesus opens the disciples' minds. This means he causes them "to be willing to learn and evaluate fairly."<sup>56</sup> "Minds"<sup>57</sup> means *understanding* and refers to the disciples' "capacity to comprehend or discern what Jesus says to them"<sup>58</sup> "What the disciples could not grasp before the crucifixion and resurrection now becomes clear."<sup>59</sup> They were unable to do this without Jesus' enablement.

Second, Jesus opens the understanding of the eleven disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem. This point is obvious but important. When Jesus appeared to these disciples, they were startled and afraid and thought they were seeing a ghost. Third, Jesus opened the disciples' minds after his crucifixion, resurrection and before his ascension. Fourth, he opened the minds of the disciples so that they might understand<sup>60</sup> the OT. "Understand"<sup>61</sup> means to "grasp the significance"<sup>62</sup> of something. It means "to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one's thinking or practice."<sup>63</sup> It involves employing one's capacity for understanding and thus arriving at insight.<sup>64</sup> It focuses on getting or having insight into something. Jesus enabled the disciples that they might grasp the significance of the OT. When Jesus opened the disciples' minds, they were able to grasp the significance of the OT.

Close consideration of the content of this verse leads to three additional questions: 1) What do the disciples need to "understand" about the OT? 2) Why do the disciples need to understand the OT? and 3) Why do the disciples need Jesus' enablement to "understand" it?

First, the disciples need to know that Jesus' suffering and resurrection fulfill OT predictions about the Messiah. This pericope has three sequential parts; Jesus' first speech (44), Luke's comment (45), and

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<sup>56</sup> Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies: 1988). 1:332.

<sup>57</sup> Greek nou:V.

<sup>58</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 243.

<sup>59</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, BECNT (Baker: 1996), 1937.

<sup>60</sup> The construction tou: sunievnai indicates purpose.

<sup>61</sup> Greek sunivhmi.

<sup>62</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 341.

<sup>63</sup> *BDAG*, 972.

<sup>64</sup> Louw & Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:380.

Jesus' second speech (46-49). Prior to his first speech, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples in his post-resurrection body. He shows them his hands and feet and asks for and eats a piece of broiled fish. This is followed by Jesus' first speech to the disciples.

In his first speech Jesus tells the disciples that what was written about him in the OT had to be fulfilled. Then<sup>65</sup> Jesus opens the disciples' minds that they might understand the Scriptures. After Jesus opens their minds, he speaks to them again. Jesus' "mind-opening" and his speech are closely connected.<sup>66</sup> The two activities are basically a single entity.<sup>67</sup>

In this second speech, Jesus gives needed insight to his disciples. He tells them that Jesus' suffering and resurrection were two elements of God's plan for the Messiah. By telling them this, he gives his disciples a review of the gospel material predicted in the OT,<sup>68</sup> and explains the OT in terms of its fulfillment in Jesus.<sup>69</sup> Jesus thus enables the disciples to understand now "all of the Scriptures in light of Christ's full mission."<sup>70</sup> Because Jesus opened their minds, the disciples are now able to perceive or grasp that certain OT prophecies were about the Messiah and were fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

Second, after the disciples understand that the OT prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus, they are ready to go and proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, the disciples are now able to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Jesus appoints the disciples as witnesses to testify about his death and resurrection. "The disciples were not just proclaimers of Jesus' message but eyewitnesses who were to share their personal experience of the risen Christ."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Greek *τοῦτε* which indicates that the narrative-development is temporal in nature and introduces the next significant development in the storyline; see Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (SIL: 2000), 97 and Runge, *Grammar*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Iver Larsen, Notes on the Function of *γαῖρ*, *οὐ|ν*, *μεν*, *καί*, and *τεν* in the Greek New Testament," in *Notes on Translation* 5.1, 1991.

<sup>67</sup> Titrud, "Overlooked," 10.

<sup>68</sup> Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao. "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10, Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Eds. (Zondervan: 2007), 352.

<sup>69</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Eerdmans: 1978), 905.

<sup>70</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives* (Baker: 1984), 130.

<sup>71</sup> Marshall. *Luke*, 905.

<sup>72</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Broadman: 1992), 621.

The disciples are to be witnesses to the salvation which Christ has brought, and they need to grasp the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection to be witnesses. Therefore, Jesus opened their minds that they might be able to grasp this significance. He also tells his disciples that their future ministry is to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the OT predictions about his sufferings and resurrection so the disciples could be effective witnesses.

Third, we need to look at the context of Luke to see why the disciples needed enablement to understand these OT predictions. Luke records that Jesus tells his disciples three times that he will suffer many things which will result in his death and resurrection (9:22; 44; 18:32-33). After he mentions two of these occurrences (9:45; 18:34), Luke comments that the disciples did not understand<sup>73</sup> Jesus' prediction or anything about Jesus' prediction because it had been hidden from them. Concerning their lack of understanding, Darrell L. Bock writes: "The point is not that the saying was utterly incomprehensible to them. The picture of the Son of Man's betrayal is a perfectly comprehensible idea. Matthew 17:23 says that the disciples were distressed. In other words, they got the message, but they could not comprehend how this could take place in the context of God's plan for his chosen one."<sup>74</sup>

It is very telling that Peter got the specific message. After Jesus predicted at a different time that he would suffer, be killed, and be raised, Peter rebuked him and said that this would not happen to him (Mt. 16:22; Mk. 8:32). Thus the disciples, including Peter, got the meaning of Jesus' prediction, but they did not grasp the complexity of the prediction.

The complexity of Jesus' prediction was concealed from the disciples.<sup>75</sup> Luke writes that God hid the message from the disciples in order that they might not perceive it (Luke. 9:45), and they did not grasp it (Luke 18:34). Since the disciples did not grasp the complexity of Jesus' predictions, they most likely did not grasp the complexity of the OT message concerning his suffering and resurrection. Therefore, the disciples needed Jesus to open their minds in order to grasp the OT complexity about

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<sup>73</sup> Greek *sunivhmi* which Luke uses (24:45) to indicate the purpose for which Jesus opened the disciples' eyes.

<sup>74</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ECNT (Baker: 1994), 889.

<sup>75</sup> The passive periphrastic "was hidden" (*h\l\n parakekalummevnon*) indicate divine action; see Marshall, *Luke*, 394.



Christ's suffering and resurrection. For this reason Jesus enables the downcast disciples to understand<sup>76</sup> the Scriptures and to grasp the fact that his sufferings were predicted in the OT and therefore were foreordained by God.<sup>77</sup> Jesus gave the disciples the spiritual capacity to understand the real meaning of the Scriptures.<sup>78</sup>

It seems, therefore, that "understand" (Luke 24:45) means "to perceive" in the sense of grasping the complexity and significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus enabled the disciples to have the capacity to comprehend or discern in order that they might have insight into the message of the OT predictions about Jesus' suffering and resurrection. He enabled them to grasp that these predictions were fulfilled in Christ according to God's plan.

## Conclusion

This enabling ministry of Jesus is both personal and specific. Jesus personally opened the minds of the disciples. And this ministry was given 1) to a specific group—the disciples who were a confused group, 2) at a specific time—after the death and resurrection and before the ascension of Jesus when he would return to his Father, 3) for a specific purpose—to give the disciples insight into Christ's fulfillment of OT predictions concerning his suffering and death as being God's foreordained plan for his life, 4) a specific reason—God had hidden the complexity of Jesus' death and resurrection from the disciples, and 5) for a specific result—that the disciples might be effective witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection to the nations.

This was a specific ministry which was prompted by a specific situation. It was a situation-prompted ministry. Since Jesus was about to return to his Father, he needed to prepare the disciples to witness concerning his life and ministry. Consequently, since the disciples were unable to comprehend the complexity of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus needed to help them fully understand that what

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<sup>76</sup> It is informative to note that verb form which occurs in 24:45 "to understand" (sunievnai) comes from the same verb (sunivhmi) as the verb form which occurs in 18:34 in "did not understand" (sunh:kan). This means that the meaning of the verb is the same in both occurrences.

<sup>77</sup> *DNTT*,3:132.

<sup>78</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Eerdmans: 1966), 641.

happened to him was the fulfillment of OT prophecies about the Messiah. As a result of Jesus opening their minds, the disciples proclaimed repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations.

### **Contribution**

The personal nature and multifaceted specificity of Jesus' enabling ministry limits it to the eleven disciples. Jesus does not minister personally in this way to subsequent believers. And there is no indication that this ministry was transferred to the HS that he might accomplish it among Christians. Also, this enabling ministry does not seem to be necessary for subsequent Christians since they do not share a similar situation with the disciples. Subsequent believers have the NT to help them understand the complexities of Jesus' death and resurrection as they concern the OT. Since the NT explains these complexities, they are not hidden from them. They are not called to be—and cannot be—witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection as the disciples were. Since Jesus' ministry did not give the meaning of the Scriptures to the disciples, this passage does not teach the “meaning-view” of illumination.

## **1 JOHN 2:20, 27**

### **Contention**

MacArthur defines illumination as the work of the HS “that opens one's spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God.” He believes that 1 John 2:20, 27 teaches that the HS provides illumination for believers.<sup>79</sup> Thomas suggests that this anointing mentioned in these verses frees the interpreter from misinterpretations and enables Christian interpreters to “have access to what may be called divinely enabled objectivity” in handling Scripture.<sup>80</sup> Plummer adds that that these verses teach that “all Christians are assured of the supernatural presence of the HS, who will teach them and protect them from error.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, *Preaching*, 103-04.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, 52-3.

<sup>81</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 180.

## Context

In the first of these verses John tells his readers that they have an anointing<sup>82</sup> from the Holy One, and consequently<sup>83</sup> they all know<sup>84</sup> the truth.<sup>85</sup> John emphasizes that his readers all know the truth, even though the secessionists apparently are claiming to be the ones who have it. John adds that since this anointing abides in them, they do not need anyone to teach them (2:27). His readers need no one to teach them since the anointing teaches them about all things.

## Content

Four questions emerge as we look at this passage: 1) What or who is the “anointing”? 2) What does the “anointing” teach the readers which resulted in them knowing the truth? 3) How does that which the anointing taught the readers relate to interpretation? 4) Does that which the anointing taught John’s readers apply to Christians today? The answers to these questions come from studying the content of these verses in their context.

John has just finished telling his readers not to love the world or the things in the world because the world is passing away. In contrast to the one who loves the world, the one who does the will of God remains forever. He then warns his readers that many antichrists<sup>86</sup> have come into world, showing that it is the last hour. He then speaks to the readers’ situation. Some professed believers, who were part of the readers’ Christian community, went out from them.<sup>87</sup> These “antichrists” separated<sup>88</sup> themselves from John’s readers. They left the community because they did not belong to the community. When the secessionists left the community, it became quite clear that they did not belong to the community.

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<sup>82</sup> Greek cri:sma.

<sup>83</sup> The conjunction “and” (kai;) joins the two clauses so closely that they are basically one entity.

<sup>84</sup> The reading “you all know” seems to be more likely than “you know all things,” although both readings have decent documentary support and are exegetically defensible; Phillip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Tyndale House: 2008), 775. It seems likely that pavnta (“all things”) replaced pavnteV (“all know”) in order to provide a direct object for oi[date 9]“you know”) since it is unusual for this verb not to have an object; Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 505. For the view that “you know all things” is preferred see Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Eerdmans: 2000), 103.

<sup>85</sup> The words “the truth” are not in this verse, but do occur in the following verse.

<sup>86</sup> John uses this term to refer to the heterodox ex-members of his own community who were denying the true identity of Jesus who were leading others astray; Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Revised (Thomas Nelson: 2007), 96.

<sup>87</sup> The fronting of ejx hJmw:n (“from us”) makes it prominent.

<sup>88</sup> The phrasing ejx hJmw:n indicates separation.

At this point in his letter, John tells his readers that they have an anointing.<sup>89</sup> The emphatic pronoun<sup>90</sup> heightens the distinction between those who departed and those who remain. The readers have an anointing; those who left do not. This is an important point in John's response to his readers' situation.

John views the anointing<sup>91</sup> as beneficial. It refers to a special endowment and refers to the Paraclete which Jesus promised to his disciples. Just as the Paraclete enabled the disciples for a specific task in their situation, in the same way the indwelling HS also enables John's readers for a particular task. The HS which they have most likely comes from Jesus.<sup>92</sup> John's point seems to be that his readers have the HS who will enable them in this specific situation which relates to the departure of some from their community.

As a result<sup>93</sup> of possessing the anointing, all<sup>94</sup> John's readers know the truth. Having an anointing and knowing the truth are closely related elements.<sup>95</sup> John twice tells his readers that they know the truth and adds that they also know that no lie is of the truth. He refers to a specific lie—denying that Jesus is the Christ—which is not of the truth. By denying that Jesus is the Christ, those who have departed refute Jesus' messiahship. Consequently, they deny that Jesus is the anointed Son of the Father. This is the distinction between John's readers and those who left the community. The readers accept the truth of the confession which those who left deny. Therefore, the issue is not the meaning of the confession (*Jesus is the Christ*); it is accepting the meaning as truth. Those who left the community know the meaning of the confession; they refuse to accept it as truth. If they did not know the

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<sup>89</sup> Although many translate the *kaiv* which begins the sentence as an adversative conjunction, "but", it may function adverbially marking what follows with prominence; Titrud, "Overlooked," 4, 18. See also Martin M. Cully, *I, II, III John* (Baylor University: 2004), 50-1. It may be translated "moreover"; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 99.

<sup>90</sup> John writes, "You have an anointing" and puts emphasis on "you."

<sup>91</sup> Greek *cri:sma*.

<sup>92</sup> That the "Holy One" is Jesus is the view of most scholars. See Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, NAC (B&H: 2001), 118-19. For the view that the Holy One could be Christ, God, or the HS see Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, ECNT (Baker: 2008), 150-51.

<sup>93</sup> *Kaiv* introduces the result of their having an anointing; see Kevin Titrud, "The Function of *kaiv* in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter," *Linguistic and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. by David Alan Black (Broadman: 1992), 257.

<sup>94</sup> This assumes that *pavnteV* is the correct reading. For a discussion of the variant see Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 505 and Matianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John*, IVPNTC (IVP: 1992), 77.

<sup>95</sup> *Kaiv* ("and") functions to express such a close relationship between the conjoined constituents ("having" and "knowing") that they are often perceived as a single entity. See Titrud, "Function," 247.

meaning, they would not be able to deny it. By way of contrast, because the readers have the HS, they are able to acknowledge the confession as truth. This anointing is present in those who have not seceded from the community, and it enables them to detect the doctrinal error of the heretics who have left the community.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, this anointing enables them to recognize the truth and refuse falsehood.<sup>97</sup>

John instructs his readers about this anointing ministry of the HS because those who left them are trying to deceive them concerning Jesus being the Christ. This is the situation which the rest of the passage addresses. John reminds his readers that they<sup>98</sup> have received an anointing<sup>99</sup> which remains in them so that they do not need anyone to teach them. This anointing teaches them all things, which understood in this context, refers to correct teaching about Jesus. Since the HS teachers the readers “all things” about the person of Christ, they are able to reject the denial that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son come in the flesh.<sup>100</sup> John is not denying the place and importance of human teachers. (John himself, in fact, is teaching through this letter). Rather, this “no-teaching” statement must be understood in the situation of potential deception which the readers are facing.

The readers do not need additional revelation about Jesus being the Christ. Consequently, the secessionists cannot teach the readers anything about the person of Jesus Christ. Instead they are to let the correct teaching about Jesus as Messiah which they heard from the beginning remain in them. They do not need those who left them to teach them something other than what they had already been taught about Jesus and his messiahship. They do not suddenly need new teaching about Jesus, such as the secessionists are offering.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently, the HS enables John’s readers to discern whether or not what they are hearing conforms to what they heard about Jesus in the beginning. Therefore, the anointing helps them sift out

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<sup>96</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Revised, WBC (Thomas Nelson: 2007), 99.

<sup>97</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Eerdmans: 1970), 76.

<sup>98</sup> John writes, “You have received an anointing” and makes “you” emphatic.

<sup>99</sup> Kai; which begins this sentence functions adverbially marking prominence for what follows. It may be translated “moreover”. It adds a strong reason for not being deceived; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Eerdmans: 178), 162.

<sup>100</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Eerdmans: 2000), 108.

<sup>101</sup> Thompson, *1-3 John*, 82.

and accept what is true.<sup>102</sup> The HS, who dwells in them, continually endows them and enables them to stand firm against the deceivers and to discern heretical error.<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

John writes to a specific group of people: believers who (likely) live in or around Ephesus. His readers are in a specific situation: professing believers have separated from them and are attempting to deceive them concerning the person of Jesus. These secessionists want John's readers to deny that Jesus came in the flesh. The readers have a specific problem: they are struggling concerning the truth about Jesus. Therefore, John provides the answer to their struggle: the HS who dwells in them will assure them that that which they heard about Jesus in the beginning is true. John does not say how the HS does it, only that he does it. The anointing of the HS is the answer to their specific situation-problem. The HS is an abiding situation-provision. Therefore John's answer is historically bound.

## Contribution

Although John is addressing his readers' specific situation and problem, both the situation and the problem are *repeatable*. Subsequent believers may face the same situation and problem. Subsequent professing believers may (and do) believe false doctrine about Christ and may (and do) attempt to get believers to believe that false doctrine. Consequently, these believers may (and do) struggle concerning the truth about Jesus. They may question whether that which they learned about Jesus is true. Since subsequent Christians may face the same situation and problem, John's answer is applicable to them. This ministry of the HS is not limited to John's readers. The HS continues to assure believers somehow, in some way, of the truth of what they believe.

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<sup>102</sup> R. Schnackenburg quoted in Marshall, *Epistles*, 163.

<sup>103</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (Bob Jones University: 1991), 122.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14

### Contention

Paul tells the Corinthian readers that the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit. Many interpret this statement to mean that apart from the illumination of the HS, a person cannot “understand” the meaning of biblical texts. Concerning this statement MacArthur writes: “It is impossible to properly understand God’s objective revelation in Scripture apart from the illuminating work of the HS. No clear understanding of Scripture leading to powerful preaching is possible without the Spirit’s work of illumination.”<sup>104</sup> Illumination is necessary because of the noetic effects of the fall.<sup>105</sup> Erickson writes: “Illumination is necessary because of sin’s effect on the noetic powers of human beings.”<sup>106</sup>

Does this mean that the unbeliever is unable to understand the meaning of the Bible since he or she does not experience this ministry of the Spirit? According to some writers unbelievers can understand the meaning of the Bible to some degree. Ryrie writes that unbelievers “may achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible.”<sup>107</sup> Plummer thinks that unbelievers “can understand portions of Scripture,” and this “points to God’s common grace in giving all humans (regenerate and unregenerate) rational minds.”<sup>108</sup> He adds that unbelievers’ “intermittent correct readings of the Bible testify to the clarity of God’s revelation.”<sup>109</sup> Evidently, these writers think that the unbeliever is able to understand the meaning of some Scripture sometimes.

### Content

Paul writes that the natural<sup>110</sup> or unsaved person<sup>111</sup> does not receive Paul’s message, because it is foolishness to him. Paul refers to a person who depends on human faculties without the aid of the

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<sup>104</sup> MacArthur, “Expository,” 102.

<sup>105</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 146.

<sup>106</sup> Erickson, *Evangelical*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Ryrie, *Theology*, ii6.

<sup>108</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Greek *yucikovV*.

HS.<sup>112</sup> This type of person does not receive<sup>113</sup> Paul's preaching. "Receive" emphasizes the passive attitude of receiving<sup>114</sup> and frequently has the component of enthusiastic acceptance.<sup>115</sup> Paul simply writes that unbelievers do not *welcome* the wisdom of God revealed in Spirit-taught words. The implication is not that these persons are simply incapable of understanding, but that they reject the understanding because they do not have the help of the HS.<sup>116</sup>

Paul then explains<sup>117</sup> to the Corinthians that the natural man does not welcome God's revealed wisdom because it is foolishness<sup>118</sup> to him.<sup>119</sup> "Foolishness" expresses the idea of stupidity, mindlessness, nonsense, silliness.<sup>120</sup> Because God's revelation is folly to him, he does not welcome it.

Paul adds that the natural man has the necessary capacity<sup>121</sup> to know them. Because he is unable to know them, the natural man does not welcome them. His inability to know is closely associated<sup>122</sup> with his judgment that they are foolishness and gives a second reason for him not welcoming them. It is not that the natural man does not want to know them; rather, he is unable to know<sup>123</sup> them. The emphasis is on his inability. "Know" has the idea of grasping and understanding the object perceived by the mind.<sup>124</sup> Because the things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man, he

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<sup>111</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Eerdmans: 1987), 116 and F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (Olyphants: 1971), 41.

<sup>112</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Baker: 2003), 1001.

<sup>113</sup> The present verb form *devcetai* is gnomic which denotes a general, timeless fact. See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Eerdmans: 2010), 135. The sense is that he will never welcome them. See Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (B & H: 1994), 110.

<sup>114</sup> *DNTT*, 3:744.

<sup>115</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The first Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Eerdmans: 1987), 116.

<sup>117</sup> The conjunction *gavr* ("for") introduces material which provides an explanation for the previous assertion; Runge, *Grammar*, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Greek *mwriva*.

<sup>119</sup> At this point Paul changes the focus the unregenerate man to foolishness; see Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 39.

<sup>120</sup> Spicq, *TLNT*, 2:540.

<sup>121</sup> Greek *duvnamai* which signifies being "capable for doing or achieving"; Danker, *Lexicon*, 102. The present verb form *duvnatai* is a gnomic present expressing a general, timeless fact. The idea is that he is never able to know them.

<sup>122</sup> The conjunction *kaiv* ("and") constrains the inability to know to be closely associated with thinking them to be foolish.

<sup>123</sup> Greek *gnw:nai*.

<sup>124</sup> *DNTT*, 2:391.



is unable to form the right judgment or draw the right conclusion about them.<sup>125</sup> And because he is unable to understand it correctly, the unbeliever rejects God's revelation. (If he was unable to know the meaning of the revelation, the unbeliever would not reject it). Cognition results in rejection. Consequently, the unregenerate man is not able to respond positively to the things from the Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

The unsaved man is not able to understand God's revelation because it is spiritually discerned. His inability to discern<sup>127</sup> spiritually provides the cause for the natural man's inability to understand. It means to investigate or examine in a judicial sense which results in a judgment. "To discern" is used here with the sense of being able to make appropriate judgments.<sup>128</sup> Because the unsaved man cannot make a correct assessment about God's revelation, he cannot understand it. The truths of God are spiritually<sup>129</sup> discerned. The HS enables a person to make right judgments about God's truth so that he can understand it. The unbeliever without the Spirit cannot do that.

## Conclusion

The structure of this verse makes Paul's argument clear. Paul gives his proposition: the natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit. This requires a reason why the natural man does not welcome them. Paul gives two closely related reasons: 1) They are foolishness to him and 2) he is not able to understand them. His second reason explains the first one. Because he is not able to understand the realities of God's revelation, it is foolishness to him. (If he does not understand the meaning of God's revelation, he is not able to consider it foolishness and reject it.) He then says why (cause) they are not understandable and therefore foolishness: they must be spiritually evaluated. Since the natural man does not have the Spirit, he is unable to evaluate correctly God's revelation of which he knows the meaning. Consequently, he judges them to be foolish and rejects them.

Conversely, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to evaluate correctly God's revelation of which he knows the meaning. Therefore, he is able to understand (assess, apprise, and evaluate) what he

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<sup>125</sup> DANKER, *Lexicon*, 80.

<sup>126</sup> Ciampra and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>127</sup> Greek. ajnakrivnw.

<sup>128</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 117. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Eerdmans: 2000), 273.

<sup>129</sup> Greek pneumatikw:V which designates "by means of the Spirit," Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 117.

knows so that it is not foolishness to him. Consequently, he welcomes the truth of what he knows. Thus the ministry of the Spirit concerns enabling the believer to welcome or accept God's revelation.

### **Contribution**

Paul is not addressing a specific situation with specific circumstances. Rather, he is explaining the response of the natural man who hears the Word of God and understands its meaning but does not welcome or accept it because it is foolishness to him since he does not understand its realities. He does not have the Spirit to help him make correct judgments about what he hears and of which he knows the meaning. This passage does not teach that the Holy Spirit helps the interpreter understand the meaning of the Bible. Rather, it teaches that the Spirit helps the believer welcome or accept the truth of God's revelation. Since this is a timeless teaching, it is applicable to subsequent believers.

## **2 TIMOTHY 2:7**

### **Content**

Although this verse does not mention the HS, nevertheless, it may contribute to a proper understanding of the role of the HS in interpretation. Paul does not want Timothy to be ashamed of him because he is in prison. Instead, he wants him to be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. To encourage Timothy to be strong, he instructs him through three metaphors –the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer which emphasize that Timothy's work will be strenuous, requiring labor and suffering.

Therefore, Timothy must 1) endure hardness as good soldier, 2) compete according to the rules as an athlete, and 3) have first share of the crops as a farmer. Paul then commands Timothy to think about the metaphors which he has just written (2:3-6). As Timothy thinks about these metaphors, the Lord will give him understanding in them. "What Paul here expresses is a promise, and not merely a wish."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, BSY (IVP: 1973), 59.

So Paul alerts Timothy to pay attention to what he has just written. He commands<sup>131</sup> Timothy to think about<sup>132</sup> the three metaphors he has used to encourage him. “Think about” means “to reflect upon, contemplate”<sup>133</sup> with the sense “to think over and so come to a right understanding.”<sup>134</sup> Paul wants Timothy to *begin* and *continue*<sup>135</sup> to reflect upon what he has just written. Timothy should make it his habit to think about what Paul is writing to him.<sup>136</sup> Paul explains to Timothy that he needs to think about the metaphors because the Lord will give him understanding when he does.

This promise<sup>137</sup> depends on Timothy pondering what Paul has written. The Lord’s help in understanding comes as Timothy thinks about the metaphors. The verb “understand”<sup>138</sup> means insight into something or proper understanding of something.<sup>139</sup> The related verb means “to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one’s thinking or practice.”<sup>140</sup> It simply means “putting things together.”<sup>141</sup> The Lord will give Timothy insight so that he can put the principles of Paul’s teaching together with the different situations which arise in his life so that he will be a good minister.

Elsewhere Paul commands the Ephesians to “understand the will of the Lord.”<sup>142</sup> Paul’s use of “understand” in his command to the Ephesians is similar to Paul’s promise to Timothy since the readers already *know* the Lord’s will. Paul wants Timothy and the Ephesians to move from the theoretical to the actual. Paul does not have in mind a simple intellectual understanding of the Lord’s will. “Understand” signifies “to understand, comprehend, grasp,”<sup>143</sup> and goes beyond simple cognate

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<sup>131</sup> It is a specific command which is an order for action to be done in this particular instance; see Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Clarendon: 1990), 327-329.

<sup>132</sup> Greek νοεῖν which has the basic sense “to give thought to”; Danker, *Lexicon*, 242.

<sup>133</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Thomas Nelson: 2000), 511.

<sup>134</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (T&T Clark: 1999), 731.

<sup>135</sup> The imperative νοεῖ (“think about”) has an ingressive-progressive force. It stresses both the inception and progress of the thinking commanded. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan: 1996), 721.

<sup>136</sup> Fanning, *Verbal*, 333.

<sup>137</sup> The future tense indicates something that will take place or come to pass.

<sup>138</sup> Greek συνιέναι.

<sup>139</sup> *EDNT*, 3:305.

<sup>140</sup> *BDAG*, 972.

<sup>141</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB (Doubleday: 2001), 367.

<sup>142</sup> Sunivete (Eph. 5:17)

<sup>143</sup> *EDNT*, 3:307.

awareness to applied knowledge.<sup>144</sup> This understanding is more than just the understanding of facts; it is an intelligent grasp of knowledge that has resulting consequences.<sup>145</sup> Paul wants the Ephesians' understanding of the Lord's will to lead to right conduct. They need to take pains to apprehend the Lord's will and act accordingly.<sup>146</sup> This insight is necessary since true understanding of the Lord's will does not remain merely theoretical, but instead involves actual practice.<sup>147</sup>

## Conclusion

There is an important biblical balance in this verse. Paul instructs Timothy. Timothy must then reflect on the apostles' teaching. Since Paul wants him to think about his teaching, Timothy must understand its meaning. (The meaning of the metaphors is not difficult). Timothy's responsibility is to apply his mind to Paul's word. As Timothy thinks about Paul's words, the Lord will give him understanding concerning them. The Lord will show Timothy how the teaching relates to his life and ministry. He will give him the significance of Paul's teaching as Timothy contemplates the meaning of Paul's words.

For Timothy to minister as Paul desires, two processes are necessary, the one human, and the other divine. Timothy must reflect on Paul's teaching, listening to it carefully, and then apply his mind to it. It is through this process that the Lord will give him understanding in it.<sup>148</sup>

## Contribution

Most likely the Lord gives understanding to Timothy through the HS. If so, is it possible then that this ministry is illumination? Additionally, is it possible that this procedure is the balanced study procedure for subsequent believers? (The believer interprets a passage, ponders its meaning, and the Spirit gives illumination concerning its significance). If so, is this the means and meaning of Holy Spirit illumination? This possibility might be worth thinking about

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<sup>144</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ECNT (Zondervan: 2010), 347.

<sup>145</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Baker: 2002), 698.

<sup>146</sup> E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians*, NICNT (Eerdmans: 1957), 124.

<sup>147</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (T&T Clark: 19980), 506.

<sup>148</sup> Stott, *2 Timothy*, 59.

## CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN INTERPRETATION

These verses do not appear to teach that the Holy Spirit “does a supernatural work of grace in the believer’s mind and life, making possible understanding of the Scripture that He has inspired.”<sup>149</sup> The specificity of the Spirit’s ministry of teaching, causing to remember, and guiding which Jesus promised to the disciples is limited to the disciples. Likewise, the specificity of the enlightening ministry of Jesus when he explained the complexities of his death and resurrection are also limited to the disciples. Conversely, a close reading of 1 John demonstrates that the Spirit’s confirming ministry for John’s readers is timeless and repeatable and applicable to subsequent believers. Likewise, the Spirit’s accepting ministry for the Corinthian believers is general and repeatable and applicable to subsequent believers.

In this vein, may we study the Scriptures carefully to discover the author’s intended meaning, seek to determine its significance, and commit to do the Word of God.

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<sup>149</sup> Erickson, “Evangelical,” 33.